

## **Town of Amherst answers to CPAC questions January 15, 2016**

### **North Common**

- **What exactly would the \$190,000 be spent on?**

The funds would be spent on completing the design and specifications for rehabilitation of the North Common and for phase I of construction. The plan is to have a final comprehensive design that is constructed in phases. The first phase, which would be paid for by the \$190,000 would include improvement to the drainage and utilities, erosion, internal walkways and accessibility issues. Construction would be completed in phases in order to make implementation of the design financially feasible.

- **How will rest of the project be funded or will it be cut back?**

The rehabilitation of the Town Common is not an eligible project for many grant programs because of its unique history and character as an original Town Common that is part of the public way; it is not a park or a piece of property and is not used for active recreation. The Town has applied twice to the PARC grant program, most recently in 2015, and although the project was highly ranked, it did not qualify for funding. The PARC grant program commented favorably on the Town's thorough public process that helped inform the application and the historical significance of the space, even though it was not awarded a grant. However, the Town is committed to restoring the Common as it is the centerpiece of the downtown.

The Town will work with the Amherst Business Improvement District and Rotary Club to try and find additional sources of funding, and the Planning Department may seek capital funds to help the project. In terms of completing the latter phases, the Town would seek CPA funds to cover the majority of the cost and try to find other local matches (capital, Chapter 90, private donations) and grants (i.e. Rotary Club) to fund the remaining balance.

- **How would the North Common plan change because no grant was awarded?**

The plans for rehabilitation of the North Common will not change because no grant was awarded. The existing conditions and location of the Common in the downtown necessitate a complete modernization and rehabilitation.

The North Common is more like an urban park with a paved pathway, shade trees, benches, planters, 1904 WCTU Fountain, and seating walls around trees. The North Common is also surrounded by downtown cafés, restaurants, and shops with dense residential neighborhoods nearby. It experiences heavy use from downtown workers, local residents and visitors who picnic, sightsee, attend special events like the Amherst Farmer's Market, Puerto Rican flag-raising, and Lighting of the Merry Maple in the winter, and who engage in passive recreation.

While Amherst and its center have grown and expanded, the Town Common has been the dominant landscape feature. Although it has undergone various changes, its character and function has remained consistent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The increased use of the Common, however, has greatly deteriorated its condition: swaths of turf have been trampled to bare earth exasperating erosion and drainage issues, tree roots are exposed because of soil compaction, the limited seating needs to be replaced, the tree planters are rotting and falling apart, the WCTU Fountain no longer works, there are no formal gathering spaces, and the sidewalks are nearly inaccessible with heaving, cracks and failing pavement.

The design and plans to restore the Common would address all these significant issues and would be completed by a professional architect/engineer with input from the community through its citizens and boards and committees, and would need to be reviewed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The significant change to the restoration would be in the phasing of the construction. With a grant award the project would have been completed over two years as a design/build program. Without the PARC grant funding, the design and phase I of construction could be completed in two years while the final construction (installation of seating, lights, plazas) would be completed in later years.

- **What are the specific tasks that could be accomplished?**  
Please see the response to the first question.